

EMORY PAIN CENTER

Lumbar sympathetic block

What are the indications for a lumbar sympathetic block?

A lumbar sympathetic block may be right for you if you have lower back or leg pain, especially linked to a condition called complex regional pain syndrome (CRPS), peripheral neuropathy, and insufficient blood flow to a limb or shingles.

What are the sympathetic nerves?

The sympathetic nerves are a group of nerves found along the front side of the spinal column. They are part of the autonomic nervous system and control many bodily functions including sweating, heart rate, digestion, and blood pressure. They control the pain and blood flow in the legs. Sometimes these nerves can continue to transmit pain following an injury even after the injury has healed.

What is a lumbar sympathetic block?

A lumbar sympathetic nerve block is an injection of local anesthetic and steroid in your back directed towards the sympathetic nerves. The goal is to decrease or eliminate pain by reducing the pain signals sent to the brain.

How is a lumbar sympathetic block performed?

A sympathetic nerve block involves injecting a numbing medication plus/minus steroids into the area where the sympathetic nerve ganglion is located. Ultrasound or X-rays (or fluoroscopy) is used to find the correct ganglion. A local skin anesthetic is given first to numb the skin and then another needle is inserted near the ganglion. The entire procedure takes less than 15 minutes. Your physician will monitor you after the procedure to see what effects the block has on your pain.

What are the side effects/risks of a lumbar sympathetic block?

Sympathetic ganglion blocks are considered an appropriate and safe treatment for many patients who suffer from pain. The most common side effect is temporary pain or soreness at the injection site. Uncommon risks involve bleeding, infection, spinal block, epidural block and injection into blood vessels and surrounding organs.

How effective is a lumbar sympathetic block?

Results vary from person to person. Some patients report pain relief immediately after the injection, which may last from few hours to several weeks or months. Usually people may need more than one injection to ensure continued pain relief.